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November 12, 2017

2 CORINTHIANS 1:23-2:11

2 Corinthians Series

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That's why I keep coming back to them because as I'm counseling with people or working with people I see that these five truths, something is missing. And if you lose one of these, if you don't have your hand on one of these, then you can have a hole inside of your heart somewhere and bad things are going to happen.

The five truths are these: God is in control. God is good. Bad things happen and God doesn't always prevent them. God has a plan for restoration and reconciliation. We can live a fulfilled and joyous life.

The reason they're on a Christmas background is because this is part of my Christmas Eve sermon. Christmas Eve this year is on a Sunday. So in the morning I'm going to preach a sermon using these five principles out of the Christmas story, but I'm also going to teach at Christmas Eve evening as we have a family celebration. So plan to enjoy that time with us on Christmas Eve. In the morning it's a Sunday, so we'll have a regular Sunday service and then the evening as well.

But here's what these truths do. Just a little preview of what these five truths do. One – if you realize God is in control you have a little more humility, but you don't think you're in control. So God does that in our lives. He breaks that pride that we have down when we understand that God is in control.

Secondly, we learn how to trust God when we recognize that He is good. God is good, so we can trust Him.

Thirdly, when bad things happen God doesn't always prevent them, which means we live in a broken world. We ourselves are broken. There are broken people all around us. Those broken people that are around us need compassion. So we have much more ability to have compassion on other people when we recognize that particular theological truth that God wants us to understand.

Fourthly, God has a plan for restoration and reconciliation, and that gives us hope, which we desperately need in our lives, especially when we make mistakes and bad things happen. We apply this with our last theological truth – we can live a fulfilled and joyous life and that gives us inspiration to move forward.

Scott Turansky - Calvary Chapel Living Hope

I just think these five truths are strategic for anyone's Christian life. So you want to take a look at those ideas. They will help you. I want you to know that today we're going to zero in on this one – God has a plan for restoration and reconciliation.

We're studying in 2 Corinthians and as we study in 2 Corinthians we are coming across several truths about the power of God. Today we're going to see how the power of God infuses this thing we all live with that has to do with our weaknesses and problems and our failures and our mistakes. God's power is very real in the midst of that. Not only about our own mistakes, but those people around us. God gives us this power to be able to address things on a deeper level. That's where we're going to spend some time.

But before I get into 2 Corinthians, I want to read to you a corollary passage, a passage that gives us some good information about dealing with offenses and mistakes and so on. So I want to ask you to stand with me as I read from Galatians 6:1-5. We're back to the Thanksgiving theme as we do that.

Galatians 6:1-5 says – Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently (don't forget the word gently). But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load.

Now I'll tell you that's a load of truths about conflict management in life that God has shared right there in those five verses. Now we need to be careful of not thinking too highly of ourselves. We need to be on guard because our pride can get us in the way. We need to carry our own load and the load of someone else at the same time. If someone's caught in a sin then we can come and restore that person gently. That is a lot of power.

I'm going to take those ideas now and we're going to see them imported into 2 Corinthians. So keep those ideas in mind as we go into this passage.

You may be seated.

We have a significant problem in life when we experience our own weakness. When you make the mistake and you mess up, you can experience a lot of guilt. Most of us have regrets about things in our lives. You can feel ashamed. Those things weaken your confidence, rob you of joy. They're just hard. They make life really hard. God has a plan for addressing those things, as He's going to share with us in 2 Corinthians and we're going to see what that looks like. Because God wants us to thrive. He wants us to experience His grace. He wants us to have a fulfilled life with joy and peace and so on. We need to be able to get there from where we are in any particular situation. So let me give you some background on the passage that we're looking at today and then I'm going to read the first verse.

If you want to open your own Bible we're looking at 2 Corinthians 1:23-34 and then going into chapter 2:1-11. So we're going to cover all those verses today. We're going to try to understand more about what's going on.

Let me give you some background about the passage. You see what's happening is that somebody sinned in Corinth. We don't know what the sin was and we don't know who it was. But somebody really messed up. I think it's important that we don't know who it is and we don't know what it is so that we can take the principles and apply them to all kinds of mistakes and sins that we have. Otherwise we could say, "Well that's for just that particular problem in that day." What we're about to see is that God's grace is able to help us in the midst of any challenge or any mistake that we experience or other people experience.

Now what happened in the passage is that this got to a level in this situation where the sin of this person not only grieved Paul, but grieved the whole church. They were all upset about this. There are some people who think it's the sin mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5, which talks about some sexual sin. So Paul had to rebuke them about that. In fact Paul wrote several letters to the Corinthians they need to change. You need to get this right. So he's correcting them on a number of levels. You know how hard it is when you've got to correct someone. It's stressful. Others think it was somebody who was putting Paul down or criticizing him and he needed to be corrected. We don't know who it is or what the situation is, but we do know that created a tension in the life of the church.

So Paul had done some correcting and now he's coming back after the correction was done and he's going to share some things with the people in this letter. I want to read to you the first verses out of 2 Corinthians 1:23. It says this: *I call God as my witness—and I stake my life on it—that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.*

So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? I wrote as I did, so that when I came I would not be distressed by those who should have made me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.

I don't know if you can feel the tension in the words that are being said here. That's because I know some of you are more sensitive to conflict than others. Some of you hate conflict. You don't want to get involved in it. When conflict happens, you run into the bedroom to get out of the way. You don't want to have anything to do with it. You look to avoid conflict a lot. You're very sensitive to it. So you're probably already feeling the pain of the passage.

There are other people who invite themselves into conflict, look forward to it, and it's a challenge for them. I would suggest for those people I want to underline some words here that I think are helpful for us in the passage that will give you an idea of what's happening.

Notice all of these words that describe this tension. You can feel this tension that's going on in the passage as Paul is talking about the stress they're experiencing because of a mistake because

of sin that needs to be addressed. Words like *grieve*, and *painful*, and *distressed*, *I stake my life on it*. You can feel the passion that he's saying. He says I am in *great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears*. It's hard when mistakes are made in life. It's hard when people sin and don't realize it. It's hard when people are proud or they start doing the wrong thing and they're arrogant. We find ourselves in quite a difficult situation in those moments. So how we handle conflict or how we handle mistakes or conflicts that people have is very, very important.

God has given us some guidelines or some instructions for addressing conflict in His word and I want to share with you those words that are in that passage in just a moment.

Let me read this in 2 Corinthians a little bit further. In verse 5 – *If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you to some extent—not to put it too severely. The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient.*

So here's what happened in the passage, in the story. Some sin took place and it started getting involved into the whole church. Everybody knew about this, so it grieved the whole church. There's a process for dealing with offenses that God has laid out in His word and it's in Matthew 18. There are four steps to reconciliation. If you're trying to help someone come to the right when they're wrong, these are the four steps suggested or given to us in Matthew 18.

Number one – *If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you.* I want to suggest you can apply this in work, you can apply this in the family. You can apply this in your hobby, whatever it is. In fact if more people would apply God's principles to the conflict in their lives, they would see less of that conflict. Because some people when there's an offense they go jibber jabber about it to everyone else and tell everyone else about their problem. They don't go to the person directly. Or they just harbor this and they ruminate about it and it just makes them mad, but they don't go and talk about it. The first step is go and talk to the person, just the two of you.

If they listen to you, you have won them over. Just the two of you go deal with it. But that doesn't always work, as we all know. You go and talk to someone, it doesn't work, so step number two – *If they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.* So you get someone else involved.

This is where you get your counselor involved. If you've got a marriage problem and it's not working out, then you get someone else involved who can help bring some perspective into this situation. The goal is reconciliation here. The goal is restoration. So that's the second step. Get someone else involved in the process so that maybe we can have some reconciliation on that level.

Thirdly, if they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church. Because see, the church is this great place where healing takes place, where God can use people, brothers and sisters in the church, to bring about that restoration and healing. The church is all about restoration. That's who we are. So use the church as one of your assets. If you're having trouble with someone and it's not working, go get some help from the church because the church is going to allow some good

things to happen and can confront and encourage and bring those spiritual gifts all together to edify the body in a way that unity takes place.

However, there are some people that are obstinate, proud. They don't want to listen. They don't want to change. So it says – *If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.*

How do you treat a pagan or a tax collector? Well Jesus gave us a model, right? Does that mean you run away from them? No. You love them. You love them with a different kind of an attitude. An attitude that says the issue isn't as important as your relationship with Christ. Because if you get your relationship with Christ on board and doing the right thing there, the other things start to fall into place. So we go after them like a mission field and we're trying to win them to the Lord in order to help them understand more about what God's grace is and so on because the relationship with God is the most important thing.

Four steps for dealing with conflict in your life. If you find yourself in those kinds of situations, deal with it using these kinds of principles.

So that's what happened in the church in Corinth. They went to the place and somehow it got to the church. Here's the good news though. When it got to the church level, the man repented and he changed. You never know where this change is going to happen along the line, where the change is going to take place. But the goal here was change and that's what happened. He went to the church and, yes, the man listened. Good things are going to happen. I'm going to show you.

Verse 7 says – *Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.* We need to talk about this idea of sorrow for a moment because in our society the word 'sorry' is a good word, but people are often experiencing a sorry that is "sorry I got caught" or "I'm sorry it's gotten to be such a big deal" and it's not really touching their own hearts. "Sorry, I really made a mistake. I really did the wrong thing here." The sorrow actually helps us to come to that place where we recognize we have a problem.

But then you see there's an *excessive sorrow*? That means there's too much sorrow. That means now the person is down so much on themselves they're having trouble coming back. "I'm such an idiot. Nobody's going to love me anymore." And so do you see there are two words mentioned here, *forgive* and *comfort*. We'll see another one in the next verse when I read it. But *forgive* and *comfort* are two words. This person needs to be welcomed back. Do you feel that pain? I don't know about you, but there's sometimes we really mess up. We have regrets and we say, "Oh, I am so disappointed in myself." It's in those moments the church becomes this great place where we welcome people back. There's this restoration that takes place where we help people who've fallen down. We help them get back up. That's one of the beautiful things about God's church.

I do think though that sometimes the sorrow in a person's life is a valuable thing and they have to get there first before they can experience repentance. They have to get to the place where they feel like wow, what I'm doing is really messing up. So sometimes as I'm working with parents a

parent will say, “I’m yelling at my kids. I realize this is not the right thing. I’m damaging the relationship. It makes me feel sad that I’m yelling. I know I shouldn’t be yelling at my kids because it’s damaging the relationship.” That sorrow is a good sorrow that’s motivating a person in a godly direction.

I’ve used this illustration before, but I want to show it to you again. This is what I call the red zones. It’s a football illustration, appropriate for this time of year. The middle of the playing field is the green. That’s where we spend a lot of time. But the end zones, this is within twenty yards of the end zones the defensive team go into the red zone defense. They have different approach in that particular way when they’re there. I think that there are times when we need to recognize that sorrow and anger are dangerous places that people sometimes have to go to.

There are sometimes when I’m working with someone and I help them understand that’s what’s happening in your relationship, your mate is mistreating you in his particular way. You probably ought to somehow graciously say, “No, I’m not going to do that,” or “no, I’m not going to participate in that,” or “I think you’re mistreating me.” Or somehow draw a line. Now that may make the other person feel very angry. But maybe it’s the anger sometimes that makes us wrestle in our hearts to get back to the place where we need to be.

Or sometimes a person is very sad. I’m working with parents and when you’re helping parents work with children in this area of sadness because the child says, “I’m so sad I can’t go to the birthday party,” so sometimes the parents will say, “Oh it’s okay. I’m going to buy you a toy to make you feel better.” Now there’s nothing wrong with that, but I would suggest that sometimes kids need to know how to deal with sadness, disappointment. Life is disappointing sometimes. You don’t always get a toy when bad things happen. So sadness can be a place where we go in order to wrestle with important things in our hearts, resulting in the case in our story in repentance so the person can get back on the playing field.

Anger and sorrow are valuable, but dangerous. I want to take you to another passage. This is 2 Corinthians, but chapter 7. I want you to see the value of sorrow. This is Paul in the same exact letter. We’re going to come to this passage again because we’re going verse by verse, but I want to give you a preview of chapter 7. It says this: *Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.*

I can hardly wait till we get to that sermon because I’m going to talk about worldly sorrow versus godly sorrow that we need to embrace in our own lives. Very important to understand that sorrow is a valuable tool to move us in the right direction. But in the passage it’s excessive sorrow. It’s too much sorrow, and so now Paul is giving some guidelines and instructions to them that I think we can embrace.

Notice it says in verse 7 as you read down there – *so he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him.* Three words so far. *Forgive,*

comfort, and reaffirm your love. Three different things that we can do with this person who's messed up.

I want to challenge you to think about someone you know who's messed up that would really benefit from some care, some love. To reaffirm your love. To forgive. To comfort. People need that message. And God has given us that message to share with others so that they can experience it. It's part of who we are as believers.

This is also in the same book, 2 Corinthians 5, a little bit further on. I just want you to know we have something to offer. This is what we have to offer. He says to them – *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!* You and I understand that. We're Christians, but there's a lot of people that don't get that yet. *All this is from God who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.* So we can go out and share this message we've received with other people that is *God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.*

We have a message we want to share with the world. It's a message of reconciliation, of bringing people together. It's a message of that fourth truth in the theological truths that I shared with you that God has a place and that plan is a plan of restoration and reconciliation, even in the midst of bad things that have happened. God wants to do that in your life. He wants to bring you to a place where you can understand that more greatly.

So if we complete the passage that we're looking at in 2 Corinthians 1-2, we see this: *Another reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. Anyone you forgive... I want you to see and we've already seen the word forgive once. We're going to see it five more times here. Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.*

I want you to know that we fight a real enemy. That enemy is Satan. Satan wants to steal, kill, and destroy. He wants to damage us. He wants us to believe that we are inadequate, unloved, and unworthy. He wants us to put ourselves on the shelf and say, "God can't use me anymore." He wants us to abandon relationships and say it's not worth it to even try anymore. Satan wants to destroy us, rob of us of our peace and joy, but God has another way. That way is restoration and reconciliation and we are agents of that to bless the world with the truth that other people need.

That's who we are. We have something to offer. People are going to mess up around us all the time and what are you going to do? When you see somebody messing up, some people use sarcasm, some people laugh at them. Some people use that as a stepping stone to get above them in the corporate ladder. People mess up. What are we going to do when people mess up? I believe as a church we have a special message because God has done something for us. We have this message we can share and we can bless people who need it.

I'm going to show you a video. I want to tell you about the video before I show it to you so you can fully understand it. In 2003 in the NBA playoffs, the Portland Trailblazers were playing the Dallas Mavericks. Before the game, as they often do, they had the *National Anthem* sung and the young lady named Natalie Gilbert won the privilege to sing the song. She's only thirteen, in eighth grade, and she won the privilege. I don't know what the contest was all about, but she won it. So she was the one who's going to stand up before 20,000 people and sing the *National Anthem*. It's such a cool opportunity she had, and you'll see why because her voice is just stunningly beautiful as she sings it.

But the problem is when she gets up to sing, she sings the first couple of lines and then she forgets the words. A very tense, awkward moment. In that very awkward moment, Maurice Cheeks, who was the head coach of the Trailblazers at the time, walks across and he restores her. I want you to see how he restores her in the midst of it. I want you to see the response of the crowd as it happens because what happens in this video, I believe, is very godly. It's an example of the kind of thing I want to do and I want to be in my life.

Let's run this video.

[Start of Video]

*Oh, say can you see,
By the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hailed,
At the twilight's last gleaming?
Whose broad stripes and bright stars,
Through the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watched,
Were so gallantly streaming.
And the rocket's red glare,
The bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night,
That our flag was still there.
Oh say does that star spangled banner yet wave,
For the land of the free, and the home of the brave.*

[End of Video]

The guy can't even sing. So don't tell me, "I don't know what to say. I don't know what to say to help that person who's struggling." You know what? That person needs someone to come alongside of them and love them. That's what we're called to be as a church. We have a message that people need and I want to encourage you to share that message. It's a message of hope and care and love and restoration and reconciliation. That's the kind of church we want to be. Amen?

Let's stand together and let's pray.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we thank you that you take us and restore us. You don't leave us with our own weaknesses without a plan for restoration and healing. So Lord, give us the humility to embrace that plan and to follow you into the fulfilling life that you have for us. We

ask that you'd bless each of us in our own lives as we have opportunity to touch others who have failed. Take those people that come to mind, Lord, and give us opportunity to touch them with your message of love and grace and hope. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.